



# NEWS

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Contact: Hope Gruzlovic (609) 984-2504

## **Preservation of Lebanon Township Farm Underscores Commitment to Protecting Highlands Agriculture**

Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus today announced the preservation of the 58-acre Rodigas farm in Lebanon Township through a partnership among the township, state and federal governments, and highlighted the variety of resources available to protect farmland and agriculture in the Highlands region.

“The preservation of this farm underscores our commitment to permanently protect farmland in the Highlands and assist farmers in undertaking conservation practices that protect natural resources and keep their operations viable,” said Secretary Kuperus, who chairs the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC). “We will continue to draw on every resource available to preserve Highlands farms and strengthen the agricultural industry in this region.”

Secretary Kuperus noted those resources include:

- \$30 million in Garden State Preservation Trust funds the SADC has dedicated specifically to preserving farms in the Highlands, over and above available statewide preservation funding, which has averaged \$15.5 million annually in the Highlands over the past five years;
- \$4.22 million in new federal preservation funding allocated to New Jersey through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program;
- the Department of Agriculture’s hiring of a new staff person based in Hackettstown and Frenchtown to assist Highlands and other farmers in developing farm conservation plans;
- assistance from the N.J. Water Supply Authority in the preservation of Highlands farms by facilitating closings on purchases of development easements and helping to develop and implement conservation plans on farms under a memorandum of understanding with the SADC; and
- Financial incentives for farmers in the Highlands and elsewhere to install and maintain stream buffers and other practices to protect water quality through the \$100 million federal-state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and other federal conservation programs.

“The Department of Agriculture and SADC are committed to working with the Highlands Council to develop and implement a regional plan that recognizes the uniqueness of agriculture – the way the Legislature has in the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act – and the need to give it special consideration as a positive contributor to the region, today’s Garden State residents and future generations,” said Secretary Kuperus.

“The Highlands Council is pleased to celebrate the preservation of this beautiful farm,” said Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart. “The Council is committed to drafting a Regional Master Plan for the Highlands that both recognizes and promotes the importance of agriculture to the natural, economic and culture landscape of the Highlands.”

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## Add One/Rodigas farm

The SADC provided \$371,557 in state funds and \$123,852 in federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program funds and Lebanon Township contributed \$129,695 toward the \$625,104 purchase of the development rights to the Rodigas farm. The N.J. Water Supply Authority helped facilitate the closing on the purchase of the development easement and coordinated with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service in the development of a farm conservation plan for the Rodigas farm.

The farm is owned by Dr. Susan Fox-Rodigas, who purchased it in 1998. She leases the land to neighbor Adam Ambielli, who uses it for cattle and hay production. Ambielli's 52-acre farm was preserved in March. "I bought this farm after my husband passed away, to introduce my two young children to the beauty of raw land," said Dr. Fox-Rodigas. A physician who practices in New York City and grew up in the Midwest, she wanted to instill in her children "values our country was founded on – a respect for open space, wildlife and farming one's land."

"I truly believe in safeguarding our farmland, and this is beautiful, rural land that should be protected," she said. "I am delighted and honored to have had the opportunity to preserve this farm in its natural state – to ensure that it will remain farmland for my children, their families, our neighbors and the community at large."

The SADC administers the state Farmland Preservation Program. To date, 1,302 farms covering 139,891 acres have been preserved statewide, including 242 farms covering 22,787 acres in the Highlands.

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